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Disarmament Commission

369th meeting

Monday, 2 April 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

Chair: Ms. Bird ..... (Australia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chair: I declare open the 2018 organizational session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC).

Before we take up the first order of the day, let me, on behalf of all the members of the Commission, extend a very warm welcome to Mr. Tom Markram, Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs in the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, which will be providing substantive support to the Commission. His presence with us today underlines the importance of the UNDC in general and the high expectations of Member States from this session in particular. Let me start our work by offering a few thoughts about the work ahead from the Chair's perspective.

First, I would like to thank all delegations for their flexibility and cooperation in the course of our informal consultations and the organizational session leading up to the current one. The early adoption of the draft provisional agenda has provided us all with greater clarity of the topics to be discussed this cycle and therefore how best to prepare. This first year in a new three-year cycle is critically important. We cannot hope for a successful outcome at the end of the cycle unless we get off to a good start this year. Fortunately, owing to everyone's efforts in the last cycle, we have been reminded of what success in the UNDC looks like and of the will required by all delegations to produce such a success. Let us do our best to follow a similar course as we embark upon the new cycle.

This is also a good time for us to consider what role we want the UNDC to play in the established disarmament machinery. If the UNDC is to deliberate on and provide recommendations that can be taken up by other parts of the disarmament machinery, then it goes without saying that we need to produce outcomes that are tailored to that purpose. In a positive development last week, the Conference on Disarmament agreed on five focused subsidiary groups and appointed coordinators for them. The 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will occur just after the conclusion of this three-year UNDC cycle. It is possible that there will be a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament in 2021 or 2022, before the next UNDC cycle will have completed its work.

The UNDC neither needs to operate in isolation of those processes nor was it intended to do so. As we conduct our deliberations this year, delegations may therefore consider how this cycle of the Disarmament Commission can play a productive role in all the processes that I have just mentioned. As Chair, I would certainly like to encourage all delegations to bear that in mind.

It gives me great pleasure to now give the floor to Mr. Tom Markram, Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

Mr. Markram: I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the High Representative

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for Disarmament Affairs. At the outset, I wish to congratulate Ambassador Gillian Bird on her election and to assure her of the full cooperation and support of the Secretariat.

Only six months ago, the Secretary-General warned the General Assembly about the growing nuclear danger. He was concerned primarily about the bellicose rhetoric and escalation of tensions on the Korean peninsula, which was driving the situation to a state of crisis. He was also concerned about the weakening commitment to strategic arms control in other areas and the impact that it could have on the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

In addition, we have seen the ongoing use of chemical weapons with impunity in the Syrian Arab Republic. The use of heavy weapons and explosives in populated areas has continued to devastate the lives of civilians and the infrastructure on which they rely. The rapid advances in science and technology are giving rise to new methods and means of warfare, with potential undesirable or unclear consequences.

Against that backdrop, the Secretary-General announced his intention to develop an agenda for disarmament with a central focus on disarmament that saves lives. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has been pursuing an inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach in the development of that agenda. We are working towards its release later this spring.

Since September, there have been no fundamental changes in the interrelated trends that are eroding the efficacy of arms control and negatively affect international peace and security. However, some recent signs of progress point to where this body can make a unique and constructive contribution as it begins its new cycle.

The Secretary-General was encouraged by the announcement that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States would hold a summit meeting by May. In that connection, the reported commitment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to denuclearization following the recent talks held in China is a welcome development. We hope that those positive developments will be the start of a longer process of sincere dialogue that leads to sustainable peace and denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

In February, the Secretary-General also congratulated the Russian Federation and the United States on having successfully reduced their strategic nuclear forces to the levels required by the New START Treaty. It remains imperative for that step to be followed up with sustained leadership and dialogue that result in further reductions and irreversible progress towards disarmament. At a time when global anxieties about nuclear weapons are higher than at any time since the Cold War, measures for disarmament and arms control are more vital than ever.

It has therefore been encouraging to see some small but important signs of new life in the United Nations disarmament bodies. The decision by the Conference on Disarmament to establish subsidiary bodies is a valuable innovation. Its significance will ultimately be judged by whether it leads to the resumption of negotiations. For its part, the Disarmament Commission has so far been able to consolidate its successful session last year by starting the new cycle with the early adoption of the agenda, which includes the first new topic that it has taken up in 18 years.

With respect to the substantive matters under consideration in the area of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, everyone in this room should be well aware of the difficulties and divisions. As a universal body with the mandate to make every effort to reach consensus, the Commission can hope to make progress only if it avoids re-examining the outcomes of other processes and reopening irreconcilable disputes.

A strength of this body is its universal membership, which ensures an inclusive discussion that involves all the key stakeholders. One possible starting point for the deliberations is the most recent instance of consensus on the future of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, namely, the outcome of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which was endorsed by nearly all the States represented in this room. While that document was not adopted by the United Nations, the substance of many of the actions that it contains reflects universal principles and aspirations. There could therefore be value in a body such as the Commission exploring ways in which it can support the implementation of those objectives.

An important lesson that we have learned from past decades is that at times when the disarmament negotiations have been difficult, the pursuit of collateral measures for arms control have helped to build

confidence, ease tensions and create an environment that ultimately promotes progress.

In the nuclear field, such collateral measures, many of which now constitute elements of the now traditional step-by-step approach, were developed primarily as a means for halting and reversing the arms race. The discussion of broader matters that affect strategic security could help to overcome the current stalemate and prevent the emergence of a new arms race. Important collateral measures that are possibly ready for agreement include risk reduction, transparency and the commitment to reciprocal non-use.

One specific collateral measure for disarmament to which this body should clearly be able to make a contribution is the goal of preserving outer space as a realm free of conflict. Several recent trends are having an impact on the security and sustainability of outer space activities. They include the huge increase in the number and the diversity of actors operating in outer space, including Governments and the private sector; the proliferation of hazardous space debris; an increasing dependence on outer space in the civilian, Government and military sectors; the continued development and spread of terrestrial-based missiles capable of functioning as anti-satellite weapons; and the continued development of technologies and concepts with a potential application in counter-space systems.

As long as some continue to see outer space as a potential realm for war-fighting, we will face the increasing threat of weaponization and conflict, and we can be certain that any such conflict would have devastating consequences. Thankfully, despite the geopolitical and strategic tensions, there continues to be common ground among the major spacefaring nations and other space actors on ways to make progress in a number of areas.

One of those areas is the implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs). Such measures can serve to reduce threats by mitigating misunderstanding and by clarifying uncertainty with regard to intentions and capabilities. They can also serve as a basis for verifiable approaches for outer space arms control and for the subsequent development of legally binding instruments.

Given that the use of, and access to, outer space affects all countries, it is essential for TCBMs to be considered in an inclusive setting. The Commission's deliberations on TCBMs in outer space activities are therefore an opportunity for Member States to review and to help put into practice the recommendations contained in the 2013 report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities (see A/68/189).

I will conclude by quoting the remarks of the Secretary-General in his address to the Conference on Disarmament this year:

> "Disarmament and arms control are complex projects comprising many small steps. Each one affects the whole. Each gas attack, each nuclear test, takes us into greater danger. We cannot contemplate further erosion of the global framework for disarmament. Indeed, we must reverse it urgently."

As is the case with our Geneva-based colleagues, members have the best start that we have seen in many years. I hope that they use the opportunity wisely. I wish them all the best for a successful conclusion to this session.

The Chair: On behalf of the Commission, allow me to thank Mr. Markram for his very thoughtful and constructive statement. He provided us with some very useful food for thought and suggestions for the Commission and the working groups as we begin this three-year cycle.

Organization of work

The Chair: Members of the Commission may recall that, at its organizational session, on 21 February, the Commission adopted the provisional agenda for the 2018 substantive session and for the rest of the three-year cycle, as contained in document A/CN.10/L.80/Rev.1.

Election of other officers

The Chair: The Commission will now proceed to item 3 of its agenda, which concerns the organization of work, including the election of officers.

As members will recall, the Commission is still to elect three Vice-Chairs, one from each of the following regional groups: the Group of Eastern European States, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Group of Western European and other States. I have been informed that the consultations on possible candidates for the posts of Vice-Chairs are still ongoing within those Groups. We will therefore take up the election of those Vice-Chairs at a later stage.

It is my understanding that there is general agreement on the candidatures of the Chairs of the Working Groups nominated by the Chair in the letter dated 1 March. If I hear no objections, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect by acclamation Mrs. Diedre Mills, Minister and Deputy Permanent Representative of Jamaica, as Chair of Working Group I, and Ambassador Jeroen Cooreman, Deputy Permanent Representative of Belgium, as Chair of Working Group II.

It was so decided.

The Chair: On behalf of the Commission and the members of the Bureau, allow me to warmly congratulate the newly elected Chairs of the Working Groups and to wish them every success in the discharging of their duties. I am sure that they will make an important contribution to the smooth work of the Commission this year.

I would now like to draw the attention of members to the schedule of meetings contained in document A/C.10/2018/CRP.1, as circulated by the Secretariat.

In that regard, I would like to draw attention to issues regarding the efficiency of the Commission's use of conference services. In accordance with resolution 70/9, intergovernmental bodies such as the Disarmament Commission are mandated to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources. The average utilization factor of the Commission for the past 10 years has been 67 per cent, which is below the 80 per cent benchmark. The good news is that the utilization factor in recent years has been steadily improving. It stood at 79 per cent last year, which is much closer to the benchmark of 80 per cent. I hope that the members will join me in committing ourselves to do our best in order for the Commission to improve its efficient use of conference resources. That includes beginning and adjourning the meetings on time and using to the fullest extent possible all the time allocated for our meetings

May I take it that the Commission wishes to take note of the schedule of meetings as contained in document A/CN.10/2018/CRP.1?

It was so decided.

General debate

The Chair: The Commission will now start the general exchange of views based on the list of speakers inscribed for the general debate through the e-Delegate portal. I would urge those delegations that have not yet done so to enter their names on the list as soon as possible, as we plan to conclude the general debate tomorrow at 1 p.m. There are two meetings scheduled for today and one for tomorrow morning.

In order to maximize the time available to us during the general exchange of views segment, I propose that we maintain the practice of using a rolling list of speakers, which is currently open to all delegations wishing to take the floor. I would also like to remind all delegations already inscribed on the list to keep in mind that a rolling list implies that they should be prepared to make their statement at any time, possibly sooner than the originally scheduled time.

I would also like to remind delegations that we will follow the established format for the length of statements, that is, 15 minutes for delegations speaking on behalf of groups and 10 minutes for delegations making statements in their national capacity. I would appeal to all delegations to observe those time limits in order to ensure that all delegations that wish to speak are able to do so.

Mr. Soemirat (Indonesia): It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM).

First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your election for this substantive session and the Vice-Chairs and Chairs of the Working Groups on the assumption of their duties. We would also like to express our appreciation to Ms. Gabriela Martinic, Ambassador of Argentina, who chaired the Commission in 2016, the previous Bureau members and the previous Working Group Chairs, from Venezuela and Bulgaria, for their efforts in last year's substantive session. NAM assures the Chair of its full cooperation in what it hopes will be a productive session with positive outcomes. NAM underscores its long-standing position regarding the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, and expresses its determination to promote multilateralism as the core principle for negotiation in those areas. In that regard, the Movement reaffirms the relevance and centrality of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC), with its universal membership, as the sole specialized and deliberative body within the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery.

to consider specific disarmament issues and submit concrete recommendations to the General Assembly.

The UNDC has in the past contributed to the field of disarmament and arms control by adopting 17 guidelines, recommendations and declarations. NAM welcomes the adoption by consensus of the recommendation of Working Group II of the UNDC entitled "Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons". NAM calls upon all Member States to achieve a consensus in the UNDC Working Group on recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

NAM stresses the urgent need to achieve concrete results in the current UNDC cycle and, to that end, we urge all Member States, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to show the necessary political will and flexibility. The Movement stands ready to cooperate actively and constructively with all parties in order to reach agreement on the substantive recommendations on the agenda items of the Commission.

NAM reiterates its deep concern over the lack of progress in the implementation of nuclear-disarmament obligations and commitments by the nuclear-weapon States. We urge them to fully eliminate their nuclear arsenals, in accordance with the relevant multilateral legal obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) entered into during the NPT Review Conferences, and the unequivocal undertaking agreed at the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT and further reiterated at the 2010 Review Conference. NAM reiterates the continued validity of those obligations and commitments until they are fulfilled.

NAM stresses that progress on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation in all its aspects is essential to strengthening international peace and security. In that context, the Movement stresses that nuclear disarmament, as the highest priority established by the tenth special session of the General Assembly and as a multilateral legal obligation, should not be made conditional on confidence-building measures, non-proliferation efforts or strategic stability.

The Movement underlines that General Assembly resolution 68/32 and its most recent version, resolution 71/71, entitled "Follow-up to the 2013 high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament", provides a concrete road map for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament through the urgent commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament for the early conclusion of a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons.

NAM stresses the importance of enhancing public awareness about the threat posed to humankind by nuclear weapons and about the necessity of their total elimination, including through the observance of 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

NAM affirms the importance of humanitarian considerations in the context of all deliberations on nuclear weapons and in promoting the goal of nuclear disarmament. The Movement expresses its deepest concern over the immediate, indiscriminate and massive death and destruction caused by any nuclear-weapon detonation and its long-term catastrophic consequences for human health, the environment and other vital economic resources, thereby endangering the life of present and future generations. In that context, we reaffirm the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law. In that regard, NAM recalls the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 8 July 1996 (A/51/218, annex) and supports substantive discussions on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

NAM reaffirms the urgent need for the conclusion of a universal, unconditional, non-discriminatory and legally binding instrument to effectively assure all non-nuclear weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances as a matter of high priority, pending the achievement of the total elimination of nuclear weapons, which remains the only absolute guarantee against their use or threat of use.

The Movement underlines that all activities and plans related to improving existing nuclear weapons and developing new types of such weapons contradict the objective of achieving nuclear disarmament as a multilateral legal obligation, and represent an act of non-compliance by the nuclear-weapon States with their commitments in that regard. NAM reaffirms the importance of the application by the nuclear-weapon States of the principles of transparency, irreversibility and international verifiability in all measures related to the fulfilment of their nuclear-disarmament obligations and undertakings.

NAM reaffirms the inalienable right of each State to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy, including the sovereign right to develop a full national nuclear fuel cycle, for peaceful purposes without discrimination, and to participate in the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

NAM again stresses that proliferation concerns are best addressed through multilaterally negotiated, universal, comprehensive and non-discriminatory agreements. Non-proliferation control arrangements should be transparent and open to participation by all States and should not impose restrictions on access to material, equipment and technology for peaceful purposes required by developing countries.

The Movement stresses that issues related to proliferation should be resolved through political and diplomatic means. Measures and initiatives taken in that regard should be within the framework of international law and should contribute to the promotion of international peace and security. NAM States parties to the NPT regret the failure of the ninth NPT Review Conference to reach consensus on a final outcome document, despite the efforts made by NAM delegations. That failure should serve as a stimulus to work harder towards achieving nuclear disarmament — the ultimate objective of the NPT. NAM States parties to the NPT stress the importance of fulfilling the commitments on nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy made at the 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences.

NAM States parties to the NPT further underline that the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, which is an integral and essential part of the package of decisions reached without a vote that enabled the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, should be implemented without any further delay, and reaffirms that the resolution remains valid until its objectives are fully achieved.

NAM States parties to the NPT express their profound disappointment at the fact that the conference scheduled for 2012 on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East did not convene, despite the consensus decision of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. That runs contrary to the letter and spirit of the 1995 resolution and violates the collective agreement reached at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. NAM States parties to the NPT stress that the commitments and obligations of the Treaty depositories regarding the zone, as contained in the 1995 resolution and the 2010 Action Plan, remain valid until fulfilled. They strongly reject the alleged impediments presented by the conveners as a reson for not convening the conference on schedule. In that context, NAM States parties to the NPT deplore that Israel is the only party in the Middle East that has rejected participating in the conference as mandated by the 2010 Review Conference. NAM States parties to the NPT call for the full and immediate implementation of the 1995 resolution and the objectives of the 2010 Review Conference on the Middle East, in order to avoid negative repercussions on the effectiveness and credibility of the NPT, its review process and the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime as a whole.

In that regard, NAM recalls that, in the final document of the XVII Summit of Heads of State and Government, held on Margarita Island, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in September 2016, the Heads of State and Government, while strongly supporting the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, called upon all the parties concerned to take urgent and practical steps for the establishment of such a zone and, pending its establishment, demanded that Israel — the only country in the region that has not joined the NPT or declared its intention to do so — renounce the possession of nuclear weapons, accede to the NPT without preconditions or further delay, promptly place all its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency full-scope safeguards and conduct its nuclear-related activities in conformity with the non-proliferation regime. They expressed great concern over the acquisition of nuclear capabilities by Israel, which poses a serious and continuing threat to the security of neighbouring and other States, and condemned Israel for continuing to develop and stockpile nuclear arsenals. They also called for the total and complete prohibition of the transfer of all nuclear-related equipment, information, material and facilities, resources or devices and the extension of assistance in the nuclear-related scientific or technological fields to Israel.

NAM underscores the need for strong and genuine political will in support of the multilateral disarmament machinery, in particular negotiations in the Conference

on Disarmament, which is the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body. NAM reiterates its call on the Conference on Disarmament to agree on a balanced and comprehensive programme of work without any further delay, in order for the Conference to overcome its long-standing deadlock and start its substantive work. In that context, NAM calls for the urgent commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on effective nuclear-disarmament measures to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons, including in particular on a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons.

NAM remains seriously concerned at the negative security consequences of the deployment of strategic missile defence systems, which could trigger an arms race and lead to the further development of advanced missile systems and an increase in the number of nuclear weapons.

NAM recognizes the common interests of all humankind and the inalienable, legitimate sovereign rights of all States in the exploration and use of outer space for exclusively peaceful purposes, reconfirms their stand to oppose and reject any act denying or violating it and emphasizes that the prevention of an arms race in outer space, including a ban to deploy or use weapons therein, would avert a grave danger to international peace and security.

NAM further emphasizes the paramount importance of strict compliance with existing arms-limitation and disarmament agreements relevant to outer space, including bilateral agreements, and with the existing legal regime concerning the use of outer space.

The movement also emphasizes once again the urgent need for the commencement of substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament on, inter alia, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, while taking note of the joint Russian-Chinese initiative on a draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against outer space objects, introduced at the Conference on Disarmament on 12 February 2008 and in 2014. NAM notes that that initiative is a constructive contribution to the work of the Conference and a solid basis for further discussions leading to the adoption of an international legally binding instrument.

In that context, NAM notes the adoption of resolution 72/27, on no first placement of weapons in outer space with a view to ensuring its exclusively peaceful use. NAM also welcomes the adoption of resolution 72/250, on further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which calls for the establishment of a United Nations group of governmental experts to consider and make recommendations on substantive elements for an international legally binding instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, including, inter alia, on the prevention of placement of weapons in outer space. NAM further urges all Member States, in particular those with major space capabilities, to contribute actively to the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space as an essential condition for the promotion of international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. NAM calls for the promotion and strengthening of international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes.

In conclusion, the Movement underscores its full support for the Disarmament Commission's work, which must be intensified through reinvigorated political will in order to achieve meaningful outcomes to advance global disarmament and non-proliferation.

Mr. Itegboje (Nigeria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of African States. The Group congratulates you, Madam, on your election as the Chair at this session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC). We also take this opportunity to congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their election and to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Her Excellency Ms. Gabriela Martinic of Argentina, for her hard work as Chair of the 2017 substantive session. The Group welcomes the appointment of the Chairs of the two Working Groups and looks forward to working with them at this session. The Group also expresses its appreciation to the Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for his remarks.

The African Group aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM).

The African Group is committed to the principle and validity of multilateral diplomacy in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. The Group underlines that disarmament and proliferation issues are best addressed through multilateral negotiations

in the form of universal, comprehensive and non-discriminatory agreements.

The African Group continues to underscore the importance and the relevance of the UNDC as the sole, specialized deliberative body within the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery. The Group believes that, despite some challenges, the UNDC has positively contributed to deliberations on disarmament. In that regard, the Group welcomes the conclusion of the work involving and the adoption by consensus of the recommendations on practical confidence-building measures in the area of conventional weapons during the Commission's 2017 session, and expresses regret that consensus was not reached on the agenda item on nuclear disarmament. In that regard, we look forward to successful deliberations on the agenda items slated for this new cycle.

The Group expresses grave concern about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and reaffirms that any doctrine justifying their use or threat of use is unacceptable and unjustifiable. It further recalls the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (A/51/218, annex), which affirms that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons constitutes a crime against humanity and a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law. It is in that spirit that the African Group welcomes the historic adoption of the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 7 July 2017. The African Group stresses that the Treaty will not undermine the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), but will rather complement and strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime with the NPT as its foundation, including towards fulfilling the nuclear disarmament obligations under article VI of the NPT. The Group therefore urges all States to support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by signing and ratifying it at an early date. It is in view of that that the Group welcomes the awarding of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons for its contribution to concluding the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The African Group stresses the urgent need to universalize the NPT and to ensure balanced, comprehensive and universal compliance with each of its three pillars. In that regard, the Group reaffirms the inalienable right of States to the peaceful use of nuclear energy without discrimination, in comformity with article IV of the NPT. The Group notes that, on 23 April, the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT will begin its work. It is hoped that the meetings will serve as an opportunity to strengthen the NPT by truly reinforcing its three pillars. The Group remains committed to promoting the overall objectives of the Treaty and calls on other States parties, especially the nuclear-weapon States, to fulfil their disarmament obligations and their irrevocable commitments to achieving the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The lack of progress with regard to the implementation of those solemn undertakings has caused increasing divisions among NPT State parties, and that needs to be rectified during the review process to restore confidence and trust among States parties. The Group regrets that the ninth NPT Review Conference, held in 2015, could not achieve consensus on a final outcome document because of a disappointing decision by three States parties to the Treaty.

The African Group continues to stress that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones constitutes an important measure for achieving nuclear-disarmament and non-proliferation objectives. Therefore, the Group would like to once again restate the proud position of Africa as a nuclear-weapon-free zone as a result of the entry into force of the Treaty of Pelindaba, on 15 July 2009. The Group takes this opportunity to call on all Member States to support efforts to replicate such a measure in parts of the world where such action has yet to be taken, especially in the Middle East.

The Group unequivocally supports the call for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and continues to express deep dissatisfaction at the failure to implement as agreed the commitments and obligations of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East and the Action Plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, regarding the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. The Group expresses its great disappointment at the fact that the Conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, which should have been held in 2012, was not convened as mandated. In that regard, the commitments and obligations of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, which remains an integral and essential part of

the package and the basis upon which consensus was reached on the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, as well as related objectives of the Action Plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, remain valid until the establishment of the zone.

The African Group wishes to highlight the goal of resolution 71/71, entitled "Follow-up to the 2013 high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament", as an integral part of the overall objective of a nuclear-free world and calls for its effective implementation. The Group looks forward to the high-level international conference and believes that it will serve as an opportunity for the General Assembly to make concrete recommendations, as well as to intensify international efforts to ensure a nuclear-free world.

The Group welcomes the convening of the ninth Ministerial Meeting of the Friends of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), held in New York in September 2017, and highlights the importance of achieving universal adherence to that instrument while bearing in mind the special responsibilities of nuclear-weapon States in that regard, and of encouraging the remaining annex 2 States, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to sign and ratify the CTBT without further delay in order to ensure its entry into force.

The African Group reaffirms the importance of the Conference on Disarmament (CD), not only as the single multilateral negotiating body on disarmament issues but as one that should work to end the deadlock in nuclear-disarmament negotiations. The Group reiterates the urgent need for the CD to agree on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work and to work towards the realization of the objectives established in its negotiations.

The African Group emphasizes the urgent need for our planet, including outer space, to be free of nuclear weapons, as their presence constitutes an existential threat to global peace and the future survival of humankind. To that end, the Group stresses that outer space, as the common heritage of all humankind, must be explored and utilized exclusively for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all States, irrespective of their social, economic or scientific development. The Group stresses the importance of the international legal framework that allows equal exploration of outer space based on the principles of the non-appropriation and the peaceful uses of outer space in conformity with the five United Nations treaties governing space activities, in particular the 1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including The Moon and Other Celestial Bodies. In that regard, the Group maintains that the recommendations of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities continue to represent an important contribution to maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes.

The Group welcomes the 2016 adoption of the African Space Policy and Strategy and considers it an important policy framework for realizing an African outer space programme as envisaged by the African Union's Agenda 2063. In that regard, the Group reiterates that the immense potential of space technology and applications should be equally beneficial to all Member States regardless of their level of socioeconomic or scientific development, and calls on the United Nations to promote equal and non-discriminatory access to outer space to all nations.

The proliferation of space debris remains a major concern for the African Group given its consequences for the future of the exploration and the use of outer space. Therefore, mitigating space debris and limiting their creation should be among the priorities of the work of the United Nations. It is against that background that challenges related to space activities, in particular space debris, should be addressed in such a way as not to jeopardize the development of the space capabilities of developing countries.

The African Group continues to highlight the efforts of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa in the context of its contributions to disarmament issues and in providing the requisite assistance to States members of the African Group in the implementation of disarmament, peace and security initiatives. The Group stresses the need to further strengthen all United Nations regional centres for disarmament so that they can fully discharge their mandates in that regard.

Finally, the African Group restates the critical importance of political will and adherence to transparency, including the principles of verifiability and irreversibility in disarmament, in addressing international disarmament and security issues. The Group appeals for sustained and meaningful dialogue as we begin deliberations on major issues and looks

forward to concrete suggestions and reaching consensus leading towards achieving peace and security for all.

The Chair: I would like to remind delegations that statements in a national capacity are limited to 10 minutes.

Ms. Domínguez Álvarez (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate you, Madam, on your election as Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission and wish you every success at the beginning of this new cycle. We are also very happy to have once again a woman as Chair of the Commission. In addition, we welcome the members of the Bureau and reiterate our firm commitment to contributing actively and constructively to the outcome of the deliberations.

Chile is and has consistently been a firm supporter of and advocate for general and complete disarmament, while always prioritizing that the debate take place in a broad, transparent and democratic multilateral space. Likewise, my country firmly abides by the principle of the indivisibility of international security. In that context, we reiterate the importance of the Disarmament Commission as the specialized and deliberative body within the United Nations disarmament machinery, which enables us to hold debates on priority issues with a view to making substantive recommendations.

With regard to weapons of mass destruction, Chile believes that nuclear disarmament constitutes the most urgent task before us because of its unparallelled potential for destruction. Accordingly, the inclusion of nuclear disarmament in the deliberations of this forum is vital, and we would have liked to see an agreement reached on a more specific approach to addressing the issue.

Chile believes that coexistence in a world without nuclear weapons is possible and that maintaining international peace and security without recourse to nuclear deterrence is — in addition to an ethical imperative — an attainable goal in line with the international system for the protection of human rights, which is of particular urgency in the current international environment, which is rocked by recent threats related to weapons of mass destruction, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

Chile once again showed its commitment in this respect on 20 September by signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Such weapons are the final category of weapons of mass destruction not explicitly banned by a legally binding instrument. The Treaty offers a provisional path forward in our common goal of a planet free of nuclear weapons, thereby bolstering and supplementing the current legal architecture in the field.

Chile recognizes the importance of integrating the theme of transparency and confidence-building measures into our work on outer space activities. We also share an interest in promoting and expanding the exploration and use of outer space for exclusively peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all of humankind, regardless of the level of social, economic or scientific development. In that regard, my delegation supports the recent establishment in the Disarmament Commission of a subsidiary body dedicated specifically to the prevention of an arms race in outer space and that of the Group of Governmental Experts established pursuant to resolution 72/250. We sincerely hope that those mechanisms for dialogue will produce concrete results in this arena, to which my country attaches great importance.

Chile believes that transparency and confidence-building measures, which will be the subject of our deliberations, should supplement our collective efforts to bring about the necessary regulatory developments in outer space, including a legally binding instrument to prevent an arms race in outer space.

Despite having been able to generate recommendations in its most recent cycle after many years of impasse, the Disarmament Commission has not escaped the broader crisis facing the disarmament machinery, which, operating under the most extreme interpretation of the consensus rule, has warped the long-standing meaning and scope of this tool as a generator of dialogue and broad agreements. To promote an atmosphere of confidence and greater transparency is a priority if we are to reach our goal. That is why we echo your opening comments today, Madam Chair. We wish to call on all delegations to adopt a pragmatic approach and to show maximum flexibility at the beginning of this new cycle so as to recreate last year's success and obtain concrete results. You, Madam Chair, can count on the commitment and cooperation of our delegation.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Let me congratulate everyone on the start of a new cycle of work of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. I would

particularly like to congratulate Ambassador Gillian Bird on her election as Chair of the Commission and wish her great success in this noble work. We hope that in this new cycle we will all start off together with fresh impetus and firm conviction while demonstrating maximum pragmatism and flexibility. We have no option but to ensure a thorough discussion on the most serious disarmament issues, with specific recommendations for the future.

Kazakhstan remains firmly committed to nuclear disarmament and will continue its tireless efforts to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world. We have proved our determined and unfailing commitment through example and urge everyone to actively strive for a future free of threats from weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

The President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, when addressing the Security Council's open debate on 18 January (see S/PV.8160), called for the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons by 2045, the centenary of the United Nations. It seems that we have enough time at our disposal, with more than 20 years before us. However, without concrete and concerted actions and clear plans, it will be very difficult to achieve that goal. We have already lost the past 20 years and have not achieved any practical progress in implementing article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This unfair and rather long imbalance was the reason behind the urgent multilateral negotiations process that ended with the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which Kazakhstan signed on 2 March.

The Treaty is a strong and important signal that an overwhelming majority of the world community no longer wants nuclear threats. The world is already weary enough of being in a stagnant position for more than 20 years. We therefore took the first step last year towards a nuclear-weapon-free future. The second step remains for the nuclear-weapon States and their allies to join in. If one leg takes a step forward and the second leg does not follow, we can lose our balance and fall. That applies to the current world situation. Unfortunately, the gap between the nuclear and non-nuclear communities is becoming increasingly wide, which leads to a complete loss of trust and mutual understanding, to greater disagreements and disputes and, more critically, to drastically more dangerous confrontation worldwide.

Today's realities in the sphere of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation not only leave much to be desired but have also practically brought the world to conditions of global confrontation and the start of a new arms race. We also should have learned from past wars and conflicts that it is impossible to ensure our own security by undermining the security of others. In "Manifesto: the world, the twenty-first century", President Nazarbayev also warned world leaders about that, saying that our planet is now on the edge of a new Cold War, which could have devastating consequences for all humankind. That threatens the achievements of the past four decades, which were made possible by the confidence-building measures that were introduced.

At the Security Council meeting I referred to, which was organized by Kazakhstan during its presidency, we again recalled the most important factor in preventing conflicts and disasters — that of developing mutual trust. Our President proposed to seek a solution to all current issues related to WMDs through the bolstering of confidence-building measures. We all remember how, in the second half of the twentieth century, as a result of successful negotiations on nuclear security, the nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia were reduced substantially. Thereafter, the five nuclear Powers announced and observed a moratorium on nuclear-weapons testing. The threat of planetary destruction was significantly reduced. The process of forming regional security systems was accelerated. A unique and comprehensive security structure, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, was created on the basis of the principle of mutual trust. Coordinated action between world Powers and United Nations peacekeeping operations have ended many conflicts.

However, today we are witnessing the erosion of those international security achievements. We are again missing the important factor — confidence-building. Without such efforts and concrete steps in that direction, the contradictions between the leading Powers will develop into a new long-term confrontation.

We are grateful for the inclusion in the Commission's agenda of the item on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space. Today it is high time to think about global solutions that prohibit the deployment of lethal weapons in outer space. It is equally important to develop and adopt legally binding international instruments on the prohibition of the use of scientific discoveries to create new types of WMDs.

My President proposed the creation by the United Nations of a register of scientific discoveries, which would help track and control modern advances to create and improve WMDs.

In order to form a geography of sustainable peace, we attach great importance to the expansion of nuclear-weapon-free zones. In that regard, Kazakhstan has initiated a new proposal to consolidate the efforts of all States that are part of denuclearized zones. We are actively working to realize that proposal. Within the framework of the forthcoming second session of the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference, we are organizing in Geneva a special side event on that issue in conjunction with the Vienna Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation.

It is important to adapt the international disarmament process to current historical conditions. We need a new strategy for the work of the Conference on Disarmament. We need to tackle the elimination of a qualitatively new threat — cybercrime — which has the potential to become the most dangerous weapon in the hands of terrorists. New kinds of weapons and new technologies can pose an even greater threat if they are combined with nuclear weapons. The best minds of the twentieth century have warned us that nuclear weapons could be used in a future world war, leading to the destruction of all life on our planet. The demand that disputes among countries cannot, and should not, be resolved by military means remains immensely relevant in the twenty-first century.

The basis for the settlement of all disputes among States should be peaceful dialogue and constructive negotiations based on the principles of equal responsibility for peace and security, mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of others. On that basis, it is necessary to build holistic algorithms for actions to be taken by the international community.

The Disarmament Commission undoubtedly plays an important role in the structure of the multilateral machinery of the United Nations. We attach great importance to the work of this specialized advisory body. We are ready for a constructive discussion and hope that we will be able to develop timely and effective recommendations on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Mr. Luque Márquez (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Ecuador supports the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

At the outset, on behalf of my delegation, I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your election as Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission and reiterate our support for our efforts. We also extend our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau and to the Chairs of the Working Groups whom we elected this morning. Of course, we also reiterate our thanks to Ms. Gabriela Martinic, Chair of the Disarmament Commission at its previous substantive session.

Ecuador is particularly pleased with the two agenda items decided on by the Commission for the programme of work of the three-year cycle that we begin today.

We believe that it is particularly important that the first item of the agenda clearly reiterate the priority of the international community: to achieve the objective of nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. We have been concerned to see that, in the past few months, there have been attempts to move away from that clear and indisputable objective towards other formulations purporting to affirm that our efforts should not seek nuclear disarmament directly but rather to achieve some imaginary conditions that perhaps, in a distant and uncertain future, would enable us to attain nuclear disarmament and the elimination of such weapons. Ecuador has opposed, and will continue to resist, such attempts to change the paradigm of what motivates the efforts of the international community in that area. We therefore reiterate that the common objective is, and must remain, the total elimination of nuclear weapons without further delay or conditions.

Now that we have started this new cycle of the Disarmament Commission, we must express our regret that the limited progress made over the past decades in terms of disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation is being lost. Nuclear-weapon States continue their programmes for the modernization of such weapons. A matter of still greater concern is the fact that a dangerous and irresponsible arms race among the main nuclear Powers has restarted. Those two facts clearly contradict the obligations of nuclear-weapon States under article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We are also alarmed to see how the new nuclear positions and doctrines have lowered the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons and have undermined even further the already weak

negative security assurances to help States that do not possess such weapons.

We have even had to witness how progress that we thought already formed part of the acquis of most countries, such as the complete prohibition of nuclear tests, is undermined when a nuclear-weapon State party to the NPT declares that it will not seek to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and even leaves the way open for restarting such tests "to meet [severe] technological or geopolitical challenges". In that regard, we reiterate our call, without distinction, to the eight annex 2 States that have not yet done so to sign or ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty as soon as possible. A voluntary moratorium on such tests is not enough.

In that context, brought about by nuclear-weapon States, we welcome, and will continue to welcome, any bilateral or multilateral effort to de-escalate the current tensions. However, such efforts must not neglect the goal of disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. They cannot seek only to maintain the status quo, including the continued illegal possession of nuclear weapons by a few States.

Last year, the majority of States saw great hope for humankind in the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which is on the right track to obtain the necessary ratifications for its entry in force. In the Treaty we have a legally binding universal instrument that, among other provisions, prohibits the possession, development, production, acquisition, transfer, storage, use and threat of use, stationing, installation and deployment of weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. The Treaty is fully integrated and complements the current architecture of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, along with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the treaties that have established nuclear-weapon-free zones.

It is therefore regrettable also to note that a few States that possess nuclear weapons or that are in deterrence alliances are calling for that essential instrument not to be signed or ratified or even, having signed it, as has occurred recently, are saying that the Treaty could potentially undermine non-proliferation efforts by introducing disarmament issues in non-proliferation forums. The latter assertion is completely incorrect and directly contravenes the principles that have guided our efforts in that area. Disarmament and non-proliferation go hand in hand. They are mutually reinforcing. There cannot be disarmament without non-proliferation, and many forget that there cannot be non-proliferation without nuclear disarmament.

The efforts and the rhetoric used by such States demonstrate that, since its adoption, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has been very effective in stigmatizing the possession of such weapons, while clearly stating that they are outside international legality. What divides and separates us is not the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons but the ongoing existence of such weapons.

Moving on to the second agenda item, on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space, we believe that the Commission will begin to discuss the topic at a very opportune time in view of the recent statements that outer space will also be a war domain.

It is therefore time for the international community to reaffirm that outer space is the common heritage of humankind whose benefits must go to all peoples. We must avoid militarization and the start of an arms race in outer space. Those principles must be reflected in a universal legally binding instrument. Any other voluntary measure that might be agreed upon will be provisional by its very nature and cannot replace the need for a binding instrument.

Ms. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Cuba fully supports the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your election as Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission during this year's substantive session. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau and the Chairs of the Working Groups.

We welcome the agreement reached on the items on the Commission's agenda for this cycle, which will make it possible to move forward in our discussions.

The recommendations on confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons agreed upon last year reaffirm the validity of the mandate of the Disarmament Commission, which, with political will, could very well lead to additional agreements during this cycle. In particular, given the continuing and serious threat posed by the very existence of

nuclear weapons to the survival of the human species, agreement on recommendations to achieve the goal of nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons must be our priority.

Concrete results were achieved on nuclear disarmament in 2017. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons codified into international law the illegitimacy and illegality of nuclear weapons, while banning their very existence, use and the threat of the use of such weapons and all kinds of nuclear tests. Cuba supports the early entry into force of the Treaty and its universalization, which will contribute significantly to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. At the same time, additional efforts must be made to achieve the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. In that connection, we call for support for the convening of the high-level United Nations international conference to review progress made on nuclear disarmament to be held in New York from 14 to 16 May. We encourage delegations to participate at the highest level.

We also recall that the commemoration on 26 September of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons is an important opportunity to sensitize the international community about the danger of those weapons.

Nuclear-weapon States and others that are protected by the so-called nuclear umbrella must show political will and commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world and begin to fulfil their obligations under the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. However, some States continue to modernize their nuclear weapons and develop new types of weapons, including through subcritical testing, as well as to legitimize their possession through their nuclear deterrence policy and questionable concept of security, in clear violation of the legal obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, in particular its article VI, and the agreements reached at the 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences.

We encourage the reversal of those trends so as to overcome the failure of the ninth Review Conference and achieve concrete progress during the current Treaty review cycle. We once again urge the convening without further delay of an international conference for the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. It is time for the goal of nuclear disarmament to stop being postponed, and the Disarmament Commission affords us a framework to decisively promote that objective.

Cuba welcomes the Commission's new agenda item, entitled "In accordance with the recommendations contained in the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities (A/68/189), preparation of recommendations to promote the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space".

As we have stated in other forums, Cuba is concerned about the threat of an arms race in outer space, and we support the strengthening of the legal regime thereon. Cuba supports the adoption of a treaty for the prevention and prohibition of the placement of weapons in outer space. We have stated in other forums as well, and we reiterate here, that the draft treaty on the prevention of the deployment of weapons in outer space and on the threat or the use of force against objects in outer space, presented by Russia and China at the Conference on Disarmament, provides a good foundation for such negotiations. However, we believe that, until a treaty has been adopted, it is desirable and necessary to implement international transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space, without those being an alternative to disarmament.

In that connection, Cuba is fully committed to the prevention of an arms race in outer space and has supported a policy of non-first-placement of weapons of any kind in outer space. We reiterate that the exploration and use of outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, must be done for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and it concerns all of humankind. Similarly, the legitimate right of all States to have access to outer space in equal conditions and without discrimination must be respected. Effective and more efficient international cooperation among States is fundamental to strengthening confidence in outer space activities.

Finally, Madam Chair, our delegation wishes you success in the exercise of your responsibilities. We assure you that you can count on our delegation's cooperation.

Mr. Thapa (Nepal): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Madam Chair, on your election as Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) at its 2018 substantive session. I wish you every success in your efforts to steer the work of the

Commission. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau and the Chairs of the Working Groups on their respective elections. My delegation is fully aware of the challenging task that they have been entrusted with and expresses its readiness to engage constructively in that endeavour, including in the Bureau. I also commend the excellent leadership of Argentina during the 2017 substantive session, during which we successfully adopted a consensus document after 19 years of deadlock.

Nepal aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The world community is confronted with ever-evolving and increasingly complex security challenges and threats that transcend international borders. Mounting military expenditures, the escalation of armed conflict in different regions and increasing terrorism and violent extremism suggest a reversal of the two decades of post-Cold War peace. Those challenges also pose grave threats to smaller and weaker countries with respect to their ability to ensure their national security. Therefore, the United Nations disarmament institutions should strengthen themselves, reinforce each other's activities and work in a complementary and synchronized fashion to achieve the objective of international peace and security. To that end, with its universal membership, the UNDC has a particular responsibility.

The UNDC successfully proved its worth and relevance last year by adopting by consensus recommendations on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. It was a significant triumph of multilateralism that kept alive our hopes and trust in the UNDC. Nepal expects that the current substantive session will further embolden our trust and hope in multilateral disarmament mechanisms.

Nepal reaffirms its principled position that universal peace and security can be ensured only through the time-bound, general and complete disarmament of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Nepal continues to emphasize that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

As a signatory to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Nepal urges all Member States to demonstrate genuine political will and exercise the utmost flexibility to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. As a party to the NPT and a signatory of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, Nepal emphasizes that the States possessing nuclear weapons should respect the importance of the principles of transparency, irreversibility and verifiability when it comes to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Nepal maintains that the exploration and use of outer space should be carried out for the wider benefit and the greater cause of humankind. All countries, irrespective of their size and level of economic development, should be given an equal opportunity to access space technology. Moreover, least developed countries (LDCs) and landlocked developing countries, which are yet to benefit proportionately from the remarkable achievements in space technology, should be given due consideration in accessing such technology.

Nepal also maintains that outer space should be used solely for peaceful purposes and that the international community must be committed to keeping outer space absolutely free of weapons and an arms race. Transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) rooted in political commitments have the potential to create an environment conducive to general and complete disarmament. An atmosphere of trust and security must therefore be preserved in outer space.

TCBMs are tools for preventing an arms race in outer space and ensuring the sustainability of outer-space activities. Such measures should complement the space-related international legal framework without undermining existing legal obligations. They should also not hamper the lawful use of outer space, particularly by latecomer LDCs. In that regard, Nepal expresses its support for the full implementation of TCBMs in outer-space activities as set out in the 2013 report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities (see A/68/189).

Adherence to the existing legal instruments applicable to outer space helps promote TCBMs among Member States. Spacefaring States should transparently provide information on the principles and goals of their outer space policies and security-related space activities to other countries. We support the idea of developing the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Office for Outer Space Affairs as joint repositories for such information. There is great need for cooperation, both technical and financial, with regard to LDCs in the

field of space technology for the benefit of the people who have been left the furthest behind.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that theUNDC has a central role in promoting the collective ownership and global responsibility of all States in the task of ensuring a peaceful world through non-proliferation, disarmament and confidence-building measures. We, the Member States, must be resolute in our commitment and political will to create a safer world for future generations, and should encourage and support all parties in taking extremely positive steps, such as those being taken in the case of the Korean peninsula. We must commit ourselves to engaging constructively with one another in the shared objectives of ensuring global peace and security. And we must embrace the task of diverting the resources spent on armaments towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in order to ensure a decent life for all humankind.

Mr. Hassan (Egypt): I would like to congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your election to preside over this year's substantive session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC), as well as to express my appreciation to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Argentina, for her efforts as Chair of the 2017 session. Likewise, I would like to extend our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau on their elections, and to Belgium and Jamaica for chairing the two Working Groups. Let me assure you, Madam, of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

I would also like to fully associate Egypt with the positions reflected in the statements made on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the Group of African States and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

This UNDC session is of particular importance for several reasons. First, we meet today while the world seems to be on the verge of a new chapter of the arms race among the nuclear-weapon States. That is an alarming fact that reflects an undermining of the objectives upon which the United Nations was founded, the very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly, in 1946 (resolution 1 (I)), and countless agreed obligations and commitments. That calls for an immediate revival of reliable multilateral disarmament efforts and a revitalization of all components of the disarmament machinery, as well as a serious assessment of the existing approach to disarmament, which has thus far failed to fulfil our aspirations.

Secondly, remarkably, this UNDC cycle coincides with the preparations for the forthcoming fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD-IV) and with the holding of the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which we hope will reach a successful outcome in order to restore the deteriorating credibility and sustainability of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the regime it established, including through launching the long-stalled negotiations on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. A successful outcome to this UNDC cycle, especially on nuclear disarmament, may help to create the right conditions and confidence needed for a successful NPT Review Conference and the holding of SSOD-IV.

Thirdly, the UNDC's successful conclusion of substantive recommendations in 2017 — for the first time since 1999 — makes it important to sustain that success and build on it. There is no doubt that there is an urgent need to bring disarmament and arms control back to the forefront of United Nations efforts and to make up for the decades lost in those areas. With its universal membership, the UNDC can definitely support and facilitate those efforts. It is important to note that the Conference on Disarmament (CD) recently established subsidiary bodies to engage in deliberations that could, hopefully, lead to the adoption of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work to enable the CD to resume its original function as the sole negotiating forum on disarmament.

Fourthly, the two items on the agenda for this cycle are of the utmost importance to international peace and security. On both topics, while we recognize the need for a gradual approach when it comes to the implementation of certain disarmament commitments, we believe that actual negotiations on such commitments should not follow a similar slow and gradual approach, especially when the principles and final objectives have already been previously agreed and codified.

At this critical juncture, we expect that the recommendations of this UNDC cycle will include a clear reiteration of the agreed principles and objectives on both agenda items. Those recommendations should be based on a clear commitment to the principles of multilateralism, non-discrimination and full respect for the rule of law at the international level, as well as honouring the existing commitments and building

on them, thereby ensuring universality, verifiability and irreversibility.

We believe that there is an urgent need in the area of nuclear disarmament for a clear road map towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons within a specific time frame. Negotiations must also be launched on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, especially in the Middle East. A consensus outcome on nuclear disarmament is extremely important in this cycle if we are to preserve the relevance of the UNDC to the disarmament machinery, especially given the successive failures of previous Commission cycles to adopt an outcome on nuclear disarmament. We call upon the nuclear-weapon States to display the necessary political will to reach a substantive outcome and fulfil the potential and mandate of the UNDC.

In the area of the prevention of an arms race in outer space, we strongly support all efforts that aim to safeguard the continued peaceful use of outer space and prevent outer space from becoming a zone of conflict. In that context, Egypt strongly welcomes the establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts to consider and make recommendations on substantial elements for an international legally binding instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, including the prevention of the placement of weapons there. Parallel efforts on politically binding and voluntary transparency and confidence-building measures may temporarily represent a positive contribution, but are not a reliable substitute in the long term for a legally binding instrument.

Finally, if there is political will, the existing disarmament machinery is still capable of producing the required results and fulfilling the tasks bestowed upon it by the Member States themselves. Egypt stands ready to contribute constructively to the deliberations to ensure a balanced outcome between the results of the two Working Groups. We are confident, Madam Chair, in your ability to steer the discussions towards a successful outcome to this cycle.

Mr. Gertze (Namibia): We are pleased to see you, Ambassador Bird, serving in the important role of Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) at its 2018 substantive session. I also congratulate other members of the Bureau on their elections and commend your predecessor, Her Excellency Ms. Gabriela Martinic of Argentina, on her hard work as Chair of the Commission at its 2017 substantive session. I also take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome the election of the Chairs of the two Working Groups and to thank the Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for his remarks.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of Indonesia, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and by the representative of Nigeria, on behalf of the Group of African States.

The three pillars of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) — peaceful uses, non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament — are essential instruments in strengthening international peace and security. Namibia strongly feels that nuclear disarmament should remain a priority on the agenda of the United Nations. We have seen the long-term positive outcomes of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. Accordingly, we reaffirm the relevance and centrality of the UNDC as the only body with the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery that should consider specific disarmament issues in order to make necessary recommendations to the General Assembly.

We welcome the adoption by consensus last year of the recommendation of the UNDC Working Group on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons. We appeal to all Member States to achieve consensus in the Working Group on recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Namibia joins those calling for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and expresses concern about the fact that commitments and obligations under the Action Plan of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT with regard to the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East have not been implemented.

My delegation welcomes the historic adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 7 July 2017. It is our considered view that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will not undermine the NPT but will rather complement and strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, with the NPT as its foundation.

Being mindful of the humanitarian consequences of the use of the nuclear weapons, we believe that the full implementation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is imperative in order to guarantee against the use of nuclear weapons, including by ensuring their total elimination. I have the honour to inform the Commission that Namibia has signed the Treaty and is in the process of finalizing its ratification.

Any use of nuclear weapons is a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and a crime against humanity. The total elimination of nuclear weapons and the assurance that they will never be produced again is the only unqualified assurance against the catastrophic humanitarian consequences arising from the use of such weapons. We reiterate that it is important that all States comply with international law applicable in that area, including international humanitarian law. Measures and initiatives should be within the framework of international law and contribute to the promotion of international peace and security.

We continue to express deep concern about the lack of progress in the implementation of nuclear-disarmament obligations and commitments by the nuclear-weapon States. Once again, we call on them to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, in accordance with the relevant multilateral legal obligations under the NPT.

I would like to emphasize that our planet, including outer space, should be free of nuclear weapons, as their presence constitutes an existential threat to global peace and humankind's future survival. In that regard, we stress that outer space, as the common heritage of all humankind, must be explored and utilized exclusively for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all States, irrespective of their social, economic or scientific development. We say no to the placement of weapons of any type in outer space. Accordingly, we welcome the adoption in 2016 of the African space policy and strategy and regard it as an important framework towards the realization of an African outer space programme. Namibia reiterates that the immense potential of space technology and applications should be equally beneficial to all member States regardless of their level of socioeconomic or scientific development. We call on the United Nations to promote equal and non-discriminatory access to outer space for all nations.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight that multilateral disarmament negotiations will achieve tangible results only if and when we can generate the necessary political will, including during this session of the Disarmament Commission.

Mr. Sun Lei (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, on behalf of the Chinese delegation, I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your assumption of the chairmanship of the United Nations Disarmament Commission at this session. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau, as well as the representatives of Jamaica and Belgium, on their election as Chairs of the Working Groups. The Chinese delegation is ready to fully cooperate with you and other delegations. I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to your predecessor, Ms. Gabriela Martinic, Deputy Permanent Representative of Argentina, for the efforts she made in achieving substantive results in the work of the Commission.

In today's world, the major trend towards peace and development remains unchanged, but turbulence, conflict and imbalance persist. No country can independently meet the challenges faced by humankind. No country can retreat to the island of self-isolation. People of all countries seek a new vision that meets current needs and promotes harmony among nations. President Xi Jinping of China proposed working towards a shared future for humankind, which coincides with the international community's eager desire and unremitting pursuit of peace, development and cooperation. The proposal paves the path for resolving current security issues and advancing global security governance.

International arms control and disarmament have always been closely linked with the security of all nations. China calls on all countries to be responsive to the trend of peace, development and cooperation with a win-win outcome, establish a new security concept that is common, integrated, cooperative and sustainable, actively participate in the multilateral arms-control process and advance the reform of the global security governance system in order to contribute to maintaining world peace and stability. China stands ready to assume its due international responsibility by contributing further Chinese wisdom and tirelessly working towards a world of lasting peace and universal security.

China has always adhered to the nuclear strategy of self-defence, maintaining its own nuclear power at the lowest level required by national security. China has never deployed nuclear weapons abroad or participated

in any form of an arms race. Among the nuclear-weapon States, China is the only one that has committed itself to the unconditional no-first-use of nuclear weapons and undertaken unconditionally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States or nuclear-weapon-free zones.

China has consistently stood for the complete prohibition and total destruction of nuclear weapons. At the same time, it also believes that the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament cannot be accomplished overnight. It must follow the principles of maintaining global strategic stability and undiminished security for all and move forward in a step-by-step manner. The relevant processes must be based on the principles of consensus and be within the existing machinery of international disarmament and non-proliferation.

Countries with the largest nuclear arsenals have the unique and primary responsibility regarding nuclear disarmament. They should be making drastic and substantive reductions in their nuclear weapons to create favourable conditions for the ultimate goal of general and total nuclear disarmament. However, some countries have clung to the zero-sum-game theory, strengthened the role of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines, lowered the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons and adopted a passive attitude towards the international nuclear disarmament process. China hopes that such countries will relinquish their confrontational stance in high-powered relations and follow the trends of the times by taking concrete actions to maintain international peace and stability.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) constitutes customary international law on international nuclear arms control and non-proliferation. China firmly upholds the authority and effectiveness of the existing international nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear-disarmament regime, with the NPT as its cornerstone, China firmly maintains that the Conference on Disarmament is the only appropriate venue for negotiating a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear-explosive devices, and that the early commencement of negotiations on the basis of the Shannon mandate is the only way to conclude such a treaty.

As one of the first signatory States to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), China has consistently and actively supported its objectives and goals and honours the commitment to a moratorium on nuclear tests. China has made steady progress in its preparatory work for the implementation of the Treaty while also rigorously supporting international efforts for its entry into force. China recently made major progress in its domestic preparatory work. So far, five CTBT monitoring stations have been certified by the Technical Secretariat, thereby making a significant contribution to the nuclear-verification regime.

China firmly opposes the proliferation of nuclear weapons in any form and is committed to a diplomatic resolution of regional hot-spot nuclear issues. China also firmly supports and upholds the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iran nuclear programme. We hope that all parties will keep the big picture in mind, strengthen their political will, properly manage their differences and continue to implement the agreement in good faith.

China fully understands the legitimate concerns of Arab countries on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East. We call on all the parties concerned to intensify diplomatic efforts, take pragmatic measures and work towards convening an international conference on a WMD-free zone in the Middle East as soon as possible.

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities (TCBMs). China has been actively participating in the relevant United Nations work. China has been a major sponsor of resolutions on TCBMs at successive General Assembly sessions. We took part in the joint First Committee and Fourth Committee meetings on outer space in 2015 and 2017 (see A/C.1/70/PV.13 and A/C.1/72/PV.11). We were also deeply involved in the discussions on Guidelines for Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and have made an active contribution to the peace, stability, security and long-term sustainability of outer space.

China believes that all States must adopt appropriate TCBMs to help increase mutual trust, decrease the possibility of misjudgments and promote cooperation in the use of outer space for peaceful purposes. To a certain extent, that will contribute to achieving the goal of preventing the weaponization of outer space and conducting the future verification of an outer space arms control treaty. As a matter of fact, the commitment of not placing weapons in outer space and preventing

the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space by all States is the most important TCBM in itself.

However, TCBMs are not legally binding and cannot fill the gaps in existing international legal instruments on outer space. China believes that concluding a new international legal instrument through negotiations is the best way to prevent the weaponization of, and an arms race in, outer space. That is also the reason why we should make the prevention of an arms race in outer space our fundamental goal in our TCBM discussions.

Over the years, together with Russia and various other countries, China has actively promoted the negotiation and conclusion of a treaty on preventing the weaponization of outer space in the Conference on Disarmament. Based on resolution 72/250, which China and Russia submitted to the General Assembly last year on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, the United Nations will establish a Group of Governmental Experts on the issue this year. The Group will meet in 2018 and 2019 with a focus on the elements of international legal instruments for the prevention of the weaponization of outer space and will prepare relevant reports. China believes that the Disarmament Commission's discussions on outer space issues and the work of the Group of Governmental Experts can be mutually reinforcing. China looks forward to maintaining communication and exchanges with all parties on the issue of outer space and working towards the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space and maintaining its long-term stability and security .

As one of the "troika" bodies in the multilateral disarmament machinery of the United Nations, the Commission plays an important role in the consideration of various issues in the field of disarmament and in providing guidelines and recommendations. The previous review cycle achieved substantial results in the area of conventional weapons, which is very encouraging.

This year marks the beginning of a new review cycle for the Commission. The relevant Groups of Governmental Experts in the areas of nuclear disarmament and outer space will soon commence their work. The Secretary-General's disarmament agenda will also involve multilateral disarmament mechanisms. A good beginning is half the battle. China hopes that all parties will assume a more active and pragmatic attitude in this year's discussion on various issues and push for new progress in this year's deliberations.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Allow me to congratulate you, Madame Chair, on your election to chair the United Nations Disarmament Commission at this session. We appreciate your leadership given the recognized high standing of your country, Australia, on disarmament issues.

We believe that, with its universal membership, the Disarmament Commission continues to play an important role in the overall United Nations disarmament machinery through its deliberations on specific thematic issues and the submission of respective recommendations to the General Assembly. We welcome the successful adoption by consensus in 2017 of recommendations on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons, for the first time since 1999. Ukraine looks forward to a continued discussion on recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Ukraine reiterates its support for a multilateral approach to the disarmament and international security agenda. While recognizing the difficulties in implementing existing international treaties and in bringing new ones into force, we reaffirm our commitment to maintaining the current disarmament machinery and international cooperation in order to strengthen the existing international disarmament and non-proliferation regime. It is essential that both non-nuclear-weapon States and nuclear-weapon States be involved in the process.

With regard to nuclear weapons, Ukraine demonstrated a proactive approach by abandoning its nuclear capability and acceding to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1994, as well as by taking practical steps to eliminate the use of highly enriched uranium for civilian purposes by removing all existing stocks from its territory in 2012. Regrettably, the credibility and efficiency of some of the key pillars of the NPT have been seriously undermined. Let me recall that the historic decision of Ukraine to renounce its nuclear weapons was largely based on the clear international security assurances provided in writing in 1994, in particular the Budapest Memorandum signed by Ukraine, the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia. The validity of that document has become even more vital in an era where proliferation threats are evolving and efforts have to be made to quell the security concerns of States seeking nuclear-deterrent capabilities.

The brutal violation of international obligations, including those set forth in the Budapest Memorandum by one nuclear-weapon State, has undermined the entire United Nations-based security system. What is even more disturbing is that, in an attempt to shirk responsibility, high-ranking Russian officials initially lied and stated that the provisions of the Memorandum were relevant only to the use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine. They went even further recently by alleging that the Memorandum was a mere declaration that did not carry the force of a legally binding agreement. I wonder what their next argument will be.

One might also recall the obligation of nuclear-weapon States set out in the final document of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT

> "to fully respect their existing commitments with regard to security assurances." (*NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I), p. 22*)

Nevertheless, despite the fact that it has been affected by Russian military aggression and occupation of its territory, Ukraine continues to regard the NPT as a key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. We continue to provide comprehensive support for its effective implementation, further strengthening and universalization. Ukraine continues to support the reduction of nuclear arsenals, the cessation of the modernization of nuclear weapons and an overall decrease in the role of nuclear weapons in States' military and strategic doctrines.

Ukraine supports the universalization of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and is of the view that its entry into force will constitute a tangible step forward in attaining the noble objective of a safe and peaceful world free of nuclear weapons. We call upon all States that have not yet signed or ratified the CTBT, in particular the remaining annex 2 States, to do so without delay. We also continue to support commencing negotiations for, and the conclusion of, a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT), which will be essential to efforts to curb nuclear proliferation and to advance the goal of nuclear disarmament. Ukraine makes a strong appeal for finding common ground on the issue of existing fissile-material stocks and for the immediate commencement of negotiations on the FMCT, within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament. In that respect, we fully support the continuing work of the High-Level FMCT Expert Preparatory Group.

Ukraine supports all national and international efforts aimed at promoting the preservation of a safe and secure space environment and the peaceful use of outer space on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis. Outer space should be considered a global common good to be used for the benefit of humankind. We are of the view that transparency and confidence-building measures should make their contribution to the security, safety and sustainability of activities in outer space. With that in mind, Ukraine supported the inclusion of an agenda item on outer space for the next three-year cycle of the Disarmament Commission and looks forward to constructive discussions aimed at issuing substantial recommendations to the General Assembly on the subject.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, on behalf of my delegation, let me congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your election to chair the United Nations Disarmament Commission. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau.

Argentina considers the disarmament machinery to be highly relevant and, as such, it must be preserved. My country was proud to have chaired the Disarmament Commission last year. We welcomed the conclusion of its three-year cycle with the adoption of recommendations on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. We know that we all understand each other when political will exists, and that compromise is possible when we listen to each other.

The global disarmament and non-proliferation landscape presents challenges that demand that the members of the international community work together to reach the broadest possible consensus with a view to achieving the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. That is why the Argentine delegation believes that the best way to make tangible progress is through inclusive and constructive dialogue that takes into account the interests and concerns of all Member States.

The deliberative nature and universal membership of the Disarmament Commission means that, through dialogue, points of agreement can at times be reached, as we saw happen last year. With the candid discussion this deliberative forum allows, we must be able to identify measures that will enable us to move towards a world free of nuclear weapons and build trust with regard to the goals of transparency, cooperation and peace, to which we all aspire. Recommendations on

nuclear disarmament are perhaps the best legacy of the three-year cycle set to conclude just a few days before the beginning of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Argentina acknowledges humankind's shared interest in participating, and the sovereign right of all States to participate, in the exploration and use of outer space solely for peaceful purposes and believes in its benefits for human development. Argentina maintains that outer space should not be weaponized and that, as part of humankind's heritage, it should be used to improve living conditions and foster peace among the peoples of the world. Argentina supports negotiations within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament of a treaty that prohibits the placement of weapons in outer space. As long as no such treaty exists, the adoption of international transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities is without a doubt appropriate and necessary. Argentina welcomes the establishment of a new Group of Governmental Experts and believes that the conclusions and recommendations of the Group on the prevention of an arms race in outer space is a good basis for the Commission's deliberations on an issue whose inclusion on the agenda of the new three-year cycle we welcome.

Argentina believes that the Disarmament Commission is a forum that must be preserved and used as often as possible. We call on all delegations to join efforts and adopt a pragmatic and constructive approach that eschews pointless divisions in order to bring about a successful outcome to the current session of the Commission. To that end, Madam, you can count on the Argentine delegation's full support.

The Chair: As others have done, let me also thank Argentina for the excellence with which it steered the United Nations Disarmament Commission last year. It set a very high standard that we will do our best to follow.

Mr. Vieira (Brazil): I congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your assumption of the Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) for this session. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau. Please be assured of the full support of my delegation.

I would also like to congratulate all States that, in the spirit of compromise, worked to build consensus last year and adopt recommendations on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons, ending 18 years of paralysis in the Commission. We should keep that positive example in mind for the negotiations that are about to commence.

A new three-year UNDC cycle is starting this year, which will present its conclusions just before the next Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We shall take advantage of this window of opportunity and of the universal membership of the Commission to better explore all possible recommendations in the field of disarmament.

Let me now turn to the agenda set out for the session. With regard to the first item, we can all agree that nuclear disarmament is a long-standing objective of the international community. Since the inception of nuclear weapons, their indiscriminate power and the existential threat they pose to humankind have been the motivation behind several initiatives and proposals aimed at eliminating them. This issue was the subject of resolution 1 (I), which affirmed the objective of the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons capable of mass destruction. It is regrettable that, after more than 70 years, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation remain unresolved issues on the agenda of the Disarmament Commission.

I would like to reiterate Brazil's conviction that the only way to insure ourselves against the dangers and risks posed by the possible use of nuclear weapons by intent or accident is their total elimination in a transparent, irreversible and verifiable manner and within a multilaterally agreed time frame. Brazil believes that the Commission could focus its deliberations on three important aspects pertaining to nuclear disarmament, namely, transparency, irreversibility and verification. Discussions on verification could build upon, inter alia, the principles of disarmament verification agreed to in 1988 by the UNDC and discussions taking place in different forums, such as the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament, which will start work this year.

As a party to the NPT, Brazil is also firmly committed to the objective of nuclear non-proliferation. In our view, the key to the sustainability of the non-proliferation regime lies in combating the incentives to proliferate. Any approach that is focused exclusively on non-proliferation while ignoring necessary progress in nuclear disarmament is illogical. The continued

existence of nuclear weapons increases tensions throughout the world, fosters suspicion and hinders cooperation among States. Regrettably, the limited reductions made thus far are offset by the continued modernization and qualitative improvement of nuclear arsenals, which simply contribute to the worsening of the international security environment. It challenges common sense to imagine that strategic stability can be promoted through permanent and unaccountable military build-up led by the modernization of arsenals of nuclear weapons and the means of delivery of such weapons. It certainly does not make us feel safer; in fact, the contrary is true. It is therefore important that the Commission consider the issue of the modernization of nuclear arsenals in its debate during this triennial cycle.

The elimination of nuclear weapons is not only a legal obligation contracted by States parties to the NPT but also a moral and ethical imperative for the entire international community. It must be borne in mind that Brazil actively participated in the process that led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We are extremely proud of, and encouraged by, the results achieved. Apart from complementing the NPT, the Prohibition Treaty levels the normative playing field for all weapons of mass destruction so that further steps may be taken towards their destruction and elimination. It represents the adoption of more concrete objectives and successful actions by almost two thirds of the United Nations membership in order to remedy a legal gap that allowed for the existence of normative ambivalence about accepting the existence of the most destructive and inhumane of all weapons of mass destruction. We welcome in particular the active support for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty negotiations by Nobel Peace laureate the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and the more than 400 civil society entities ICAN represents all over the world. We welcome their support, which was central to the successful outcome of the negotiations.

With regard to the second, and new, agenda item, there is no better time to bring to the attention of the Commission the issue of preventing an arms race in outer space. We have witnessed in recent years a series of breakthroughs in space exploration with far-reaching implications. Brazil believes that outer space should remain an environment of peaceful and scientific exploration for the common good of humankind. We regularly participate in multilateral confidence-building mechanisms, such as the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities, which discussed ways to prevent the militarization and weaponization of outer space. We welcome the GGE's final report (see A/68/189), adopted by consensus, in particular its emphasis on international cooperation among both space-faring nations and non-space-faring nations.

That notwithstanding, Brazil is of the view that those measures cannot replace normative developments in the field of outer space, including, inter alia, a legally binding instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. We would like to highlight in particular the GGE's conclusion that voluntary political measures can form the basis for the consideration of concepts and proposals for legally binding obligations. Brazil therefore supports discussions on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in the Commission with the goal of preventing such an arms race. Possible recommendations on the topic from a universal multilateral body would be of great value to the newly established subsidiary body on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in the Conference on Disarmament and to the GGE established by resolution 72/250. Brazil expects that the various dialogue mechanisms will bring about concrete results in relation to this long-standing issue.

The multilateral disarmament machinery has played a crucial role in fostering dialogue and confidence among States, thereby contributing to the promotion of peace and security. With regard to the UNDC in particular, to name just a few important outcomes of previous sessions, we would underscore the previously mentioned 1988 principles on verification, which constitute a fundamental element of any disarmament treaty, the 1996 guidelines for international arms transfers, the 1999 guidelines on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones and the 2017 recommendations on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons. The current global security situation is indeed complex, and a plethora of challenges loom large. However, the Commission has been able to agree on specific issues and adopt recommendations at critical times. Let us make that happen again.

Mr. Gallhofer (Austria): I wish to congratulate you, Madam, on your assumption of the Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commisssion (UNDC) for this session. We look forward to the start of this new cycle under your excellent leadership and that of the two

Chairs of the Working Groups, so as to enable the UNDC to build on its first agreement in almost two decades, reached last year, and make progress in the cycle. It is up to us to live up to our mandate, as set out at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, and agree on concrete recommendations to be submitted to the General Assembly.

The past year may well be regarded as a turning point on the issue of disarmament, starting with the first agreement reached at the UNDC in almost 20 years and culminating with the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, with the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Based on the humanitarian initiative that emerged from the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the new Treaty puts humanitarian concerns, rather than abstract and intentionally undefined security concepts, at its core. The knowledge about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons gained through the humanitarian initiative led to a groundswell of political will to prohibit this ultimate type of weapon of mass destruction.

Like the agreement in the UNDC, the Treaty is a historic breakthrough and ends the 21-year impasse in nuclear-disarmament norm-setting that existed since the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The Treaty is well on its way to entering into force, and the Austrian Parliament recently ratified it unanimously, which will allow us to deposit our instrument of ratification shortly. I take this opportunity to call on other States to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in order for it to enter into force at an early date.

At the same time, we have seen and condemned nuclear and missile tests by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in violation of Security Council resolutions. There is a real danger that the continued existence of nuclear weapons without credible progress towards their elimination, together with the insistence that nuclear weapons are indispensable for national security, might lead countries in an exposed security situation to conclude that they too should acquire nuclear weapons.

We also bear witness to a deeply worrying reversal of attitudes towards nuclear disarmament in other quarters. Modernization, upgrading and increased investment in nuclear weapons run directly counter to the professed will, and indeed the commitments undertaken, to make progress on nuclear disarmament. New security doctrines have lowered the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, and new and faster delivery systems dramatically reduce available reaction times, making miscalculations and mistakes that could jeopardize the very survival of humankind far more likely. Those dangers are further compounded by the threat of terrorism and new vulnerabilities to cyberattacks.

All that I have mentioned serves to underline the fact that nuclear weapons and the constant danger they represent cannot provide security. Not only is the logic behind the concept of mutual deterrence and mutually assured destruction fatally flawed, the incredible danger presented by the mere existence of these weapons — as evidenced by the many accidents and miscalculations of the past — has only grown in today's world. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons takes a first, bold step towards reaching the shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, taken by a large majority of States Members of the United Nations. It does so in a manner fully supportive of, and consistent with, the existing multilateral nuclear-disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons complements the NPT, which is the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament, and contributes to the implementation of its article VI. After all, it was always clear that, without a legally binding prohibition norm, article VI could not be fulfilled. Additional measures will be needed, as the Treaty makes clear. Indeed, the Treaty intentionally allows for various pathways, including verification, in order to accommodate the different requirements of future nuclear-disarmament processes.

The clear political will expressed by a large majority of States must also guide discussions in the UNDC and find its way into the recommendations we are tasked to provide to the General Assembly. In the light of the dangerous and unacceptable developments in the field of nuclear weapons, continuing the status quo simply will not do for the overwhelming majority of States. We hope that, unlike in past years, we will be able to agree on a text that reflects our common desire of a world free of nuclear weapons, rejects new arms races and puts concerns about humankind, including

the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, at the centre of our priorities.

Constructive deliberations and agreements here in New York can also help guide the upcoming negotiations at the NPT Preparatory Committee session in Geneva. Austria remains fully committed to the NPT as a cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament, in accordance with article VI of the NPT, and an important element in the further development of nuclear-energy applications for peaceful purposes. Austria is committed to upholding and preserving the NPT as a key priority.

My country therefore continues to be a strong supporter of the early commencement of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices (FMCT). We look forward to the results of the continued work of the High-level FMCT Expert Preparatory Group and to obtaining tangible results at an early date. In our view, an FMCT, like the CTBT and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, will establish an effective legal regime, which is needed for the implementation of article VI of the NPT.

Austria fully acknowledges the inalienable right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, as reflected in article IV of the NPT. However, that right should, in any case, be exercised with the application of the highest standards of safety, security, waste management and non-proliferation. Nevertheless, Austrian constitutional law prohibits not only nuclear weapons but also facilities designed to obtain energy through nuclear fission. That position is reaffirmed in the Austrian Government's commitment to our national anti-nuclear-power policy, invoking the principle of free choice of energy mix. That paramount principle was reconfirmed in resolution 66/288, which endorsed the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, while recognizing that the activities of countries in broad energy-related matters are of great importance and that countries may set their priorities in accordance with their specific challenges, capacities and circumstances, including their energy mix.

Against that backdrop, it is evident that any formulation that might be construed as promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy for power generation in a generalized manner would be inconsistent with the outcome I mentioned, which was reached at the highest political level. Moreover, as my delegation repeatedly stressed during the previous three-year cycle, any discussions on this topic are to be conducted in the relevant forums, as set out by the General Assembly, namely, in resolution 1145 (XII), pertaining to the relationship between the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Austria fully aligns itself with the position of the European Union on space aspects. I would just add that Austria is strongly engaged in the domain of space and is honoured to host the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs in Vienna. We hope that this cycle will lead to fruitful deliberations in this most important area and thank Australia for its working paper with initial proposals, which we look forward to discussing.

Finally, on working methods, as in past years, we continue to advocate for an invitation to the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research to provide relevant expertise — for example, via video link — as provided for in resolution 61/98. Presentations by experts from academia, non-governmental organizations and international organizations have been a defining and extremely helpful feature throughout recent disarmament processes, from the Open-ended Working Group on the Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament to the Preparatory Committee for the Review Conference on the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, the High-level FMCT Expert Preparatory Group and, of course, the negotiations leading up to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It is high time to open up the UNDC to that most valuable input and make that important resource available to us. There are many models for integrating these processes into the UNDC. We would advocate for the continuous holding of deliberations, presentations to clarify matters related to ongoing discussions, at the discretion of the Chair, and the possibility of taking the floor from time to time during deliberations, again, at the discretion of the Chair.

In conclusion, we look forward to building on the momentum of last year's partial success and the current momentum in disarmament negotiations to achieve concrete progress in this year's deliberations. We encourage the Commission to continue to seek ways to improve the working methods and enable more constructive and focused deliberations.

Mr. Dev Nath (Bangladesh): My delegation joins others in congratulating you, Madam, on your assumption of the Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) at its 2018 substantive session. We also congratulate the other Bureau members and the Working Group Chairs on their election, and take this opportunity, Madam, to put on record our appreciation for the excellent work done by your predecessor. We also thank the Deputy United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for sharing his insights and for outlining the challenges and opportunities ahead of the UNDC's work during this session. We draw inspiration from the progress made by the UNDC last year in the area of conventional weapons following a protracted impasse.

Bangladesh aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the delegation of Indonesia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We reaffirm the importance attached to the UNDC as the sole deliberative body with universal membership to build and foster consensus on critical issues concerning general and complete disarmament, including nuclear disarmament. The increasingly volatile security situation around the world makes a compelling case for reinvigorating the entire disarmament machinery, including for sustaining the renewed interest and momentum garnered in the work of the UNDC.

Bangladesh subscribes to the notion that nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation need to be pursued with equal vigour in order to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. The retention, deployment, modernization and proliferation of nuclear arsenals continues to pose great threats to all of humankind and to the maintenance of international peace and security. Any artificial line drawn between nuclear disarmament and nuclear proliferation would only serve to drive a wedge in our collective efforts to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons in a complete, transparent, irreversible and verifiable manner.

Bangladesh therefore stands in support of any constructive efforts to develop and advance the work on international legal instruments and norms within the purview of the United Nations disarmament machinery. We reaffirm our support for initiating negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) on a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons as envisaged by resolution 72/251.

At the same time, we recall the General Assembly's landmark adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons last year, which already stipulated the much-needed comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons in view of their potential catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences. As a signatory to the Treaty, Bangladesh urges all Member States to take a pragmatic approach to the instrument and recognize its in-built progressive and inclusive approach to achieving the total elimination of nuclear weapons. We reiterate our conviction that the implementation of the Treaty will further strengthen and reinforce the overarching objectives of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), including those under its article VI.

We stress the continued validity of the undertakings espoused by nuclear-weapon States during the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences. We urge the States to act towards accomplishing the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals in accordance with their relevant multilateral legal obligations.

We further stress the importance of universal, non-discriminatory and legally binding assurances by nuclear-weapon States on refraining from the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States. This remains a standing priority for us, pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, which remains the only absolute guarantee against their use or threat of use. We acknowledge the crucial role played by nuclear-weapon-free zones in advancing the twin objectives of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. We underscore the need for all concerned parties to act in good faith to deliver on the relevant consensus decisions adopted during the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

We support commencing negotiations in the CD on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Accordingly, we reiterate our call for the CD to agree, without further delay, on a balanced and comprehensive programme of action towards embarking on its much-anticipated substantive work. We reaffirm the inalienable right of each Member State to pursue peaceful uses of nuclear energy, in compliance with the relevant safety, safeguards and security measures. In our national context, we remain committed to further deepening our existing cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and other

concerned international partners in enhancing our capacity for such compliance.

Bangladesh underscores the critical importance of preventing an arms race in outer space, as outer space is a common heritage of humankind. We support the focused attention that the UNDC has given to this issue. We have consistently advocated commencing negotiations in the CD on a legally binding instrument for preventing an arms race. To that effect, we recognize the draft treaty entitled "Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects", presented by the Russian Federation and China, as a good basis for taking this work forward. Pending the commencement of such work, we underline the need to adhere to the existing legal regime concerning the use of outer space and other relevant disarmament and arms-control obligations. We look forward to the formation and work of the Group of Governmental Experts mandated by General Assembly resolution 72/250 to consider and make recommendations on substantial elements of an international legally binding instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, including, inter alia, the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space.

Bangladesh further recognizes the inalienable right of all Member States to explore and use outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes. In tandem with our first foray into outer space with the imminent launch of our own information and communications satellite, we are working towards seeking membership in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

We are confident that under your stewardship, Madam Chair, this session of the UNDC will be able to help advance our work in the desired direction. We assure you, Madam, of our delegation's unstinting support for your work and that of the Working Group Chairs.

Mr. Ibrahim (Nigeria): My delegation congratulates you, Madam, on your election to chair the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) at this year's substantive session. Madam, my delegation is confident that as you steer the course of our work, your experience will guide our deliberations, and we assure you of our full cooperation. Permit me to also express our appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Gabriela Martinic of Argentina, for her leadership and contributions. We also congratulate other members of the Bureau on their election and extend our sincere appreciation to the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for his remarks.

Nigeria aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and with the statement delivered earlier by my Nigerian colleague on behalf of the Group of African States.

Nigeria underscores the importance of the UNDC as the sole specialized deliberative body within the United Nations disarmament machinery. While recognizing its usefulness and potential as the competent forum for addressing issues of comprehensive nuclear disarmament, we wish to state that the UNDC needs to streamline and improve its working methods so that it can deliver on its mandate, with particular reference to nuclear disarmament as our highest priority, and pointedly confront the challenges of non-proliferation.

My delegation welcomes the conclusion of work and the adoption by consensus of the recommendations on "Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons" during the 2017 session of the UNDC, and expresses regret that consensus was not reached on the agenda item related to nuclear disarmament. In that context, during this cycle, my delegation hopes to witness an outcome that provides for far-reaching and unambiguous recommendations in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

The continued existence of nuclear weapons remains an existential threat to all humankind. The cost of themaintenance and modernization of these weapons is both outrageous and inexcusable when compared to the resources allocated by States for more useful and productive ventures that could further the growth, development, prosperity and other peaceful and positive articulations of human endeavours. My delegation seizes this opportunity to again highlight the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which affirms that the threat or use of nuclear weapons constitutes a crime against humanity and a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law.

My delegation stresses that the universalization of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is dependent upon strict compliance with its three pillars: disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. As we prepare for the next NPT Review Conference, to be held in 2020, my delegation hopes that the efforts of all Member

States will be geared towards strengthening the NPT by truly reinforcing its three pillars.

My delegation reiterates its view that the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that could result from the deliberate use and/or unintentional explosion of nuclear weapons should serve as a compelling reason for all States to address the question of the continued possession of such weapons. Nuclear weapons remain the ultimate agents of mass destruction, and their total elimination should be the final objective of all disarmament processes within the broad spectrum of goals being pursued by the United Nations. To this end, my delegation heartily welcomes the adoption of the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was opened for signature on 20 September 2017. My delegation remains proud to have actively participated in the process leading to the Treaty's adoption, as well as being one of the first countries to sign the instrument. Our commitment was guided by Nigeria's principled position on the denuclearization of the world.

As a State party to the Treaty of Pelindaba, Nigeria welcomes the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in all parts of the world. The Treaty of Pelindaba serves as a shield for the continent of Africa, including by preventing the stationing of nuclear explosive devices on the continent and prohibiting the testing of nuclear weapons. As a measure to ensure a world free from the fear or possibility of the use of nuclear weapons, my delegation further calls on all Member States to support efforts to replicate this measure in the remaining parts of the world, including in the Middle East.

Nigeria has continually highlighted the need for the peaceful uses of outer space, and, in this context, emphasizes the importance of preventing the weaponization of outer space to preserve peace and security to the benefit of all humankind. In this regard, we strongly support the negotiation of a treaty preventing an arms race in outer space and for interim transparency and confidence-building measures towards that end.

Nigeria remains committed to using its space-science capabilities for development purposes, and, to that end, we have embarked on several development projects some of which include, inter alia, a desertification-sensitivity index, population-dissymmetric analysis and carbon-emission assessment. Nigeria firmly believes that space technology has the immense potential to benefit both developed and developing countries, and, in this regard, the United Nations needs to promote equal and non-discriminatory access to outer space, irrespective of levels of social, economic or scientific development.

Nigeria wishes to highlight the efforts of the United Nations Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament in terms of their contributions to shaping disarmament measures and meeting other future challenges. My delegation notes the valuable input of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, particularly in its efforts to ensure the provision of a robust programme on capacity-building and in extending technical assistance to many States on the African continent. My delegation promises to work unflaggingly towards fulfilling the mandate of the UNDC as highlighted by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and the Conference on Disarmament.

Finally, as we start a new cycle, and as we begin deliberations in the coming days, my delegation remains hopeful that Member States will show flexibility in their approach to the task ahead.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.